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## **Football fandom: a bounded identification**

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Identity as a concept and as a practice differs from what it was assumed in the past. The literature pertaining to this concept and its practices is very sceptical: identity is unstable and undergoing a continuous process of construction and reconstruction, and the modern-postmodern individual must realize and accept this volatile situation. This essay deals with a relatively safer basis for identity: football fandom. Studies on global football fan behaviour conclude that supporting a football club is a life-long project that begins at an early age and ends with the life of the fan. Such studies unequivocally indicate that football fandom is a way of life. The fan's daily and weekly agenda is determined by his relationship with the football club. Most importantly, football fandom is a significant component of identity: it is stable and effective. Using the results of a study of Israeli football fans, this essay suggests that fandom is indeed a critical component in the fan's identity profile. Hence, fans are at least partially 'safe' in a volatile world of unstable identities.

### **Introduction: the question of identity**

Since the second half of the twentieth century the academic position on identity has been quite volatile. Scholars from various disciplines have interrogated the concept of identity, particularly the empirical equivalent of this concept. It is argued that the socioeconomic and cultural contexts of identity are dissolving and that globalization uproots capital, people and symbols and transgresses national boundaries, thereby dissolving the stability of the major bases of collective modern solidarity. Furthermore, this process of dissolution trickles down and inflicts the individual subject who can no longer rely on a stable anchor of identity for the remainder of his life. It is argued that the postmodern subject is compelled to repeatedly reconstruct his identity – almost until his last breath.

In his 'Introduction: Who Needs "Identity"', Hall, reminiscent of Derrida, comments: '[identity] is such a concept – operating "under erasure" in the interval between reversal and emergence; an idea which cannot be thought in the old way, but without which certain key questions cannot be thought at all'.<sup>1</sup> The quasi-pessimistic approach that Hall adopts in his essay treats identity as an endless project, one that is constantly under construction. This concept does not (as in the past) specify a stable core of the 'self' that is developing to completion, and which endures social and historical changes. Modern times, laments Hall, brought about a fragmentation of identity, and at times a split identity, which is embodied in various, even contrasting practices:

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in some recent work on this topic ... I use 'identity' to refer to the meeting point, the point of suture, between the discourses and practices that attempt to interpellate, speak to us or hail us into place as the social subject of particular discourses on the one hand, and on the other hand, the process that produces subjectivity, which constructs us as subjects that can be spoken to. Identities are points of temporary attachment to the subject position, which discursive practices construct for us.<sup>2</sup>

The current cultural identity, elaborates Hall, is formulated by two simultaneous vectors: one is the vector of the shared, the similar, 'the stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning'.<sup>3</sup> The second treats the discontinuity, the difference, 'there are also critical points of deep and significant differences that constitute "what we really are" ... We cannot speak ... about "one experience" "one identity", without acknowledging its other side – the ruptures and discontinuities.'<sup>4</sup> It appears that the second vector is at present victorious. It also appears that identity is indeed a fluid, open process that is never completed. In practice, it is in crisis.<sup>5</sup> Class, nation and gender do not and could not offer a solid base. In Bourdieu's phrasing, the subject's habitus are no longer solid and ensured, but fragmentary and unpredictable.<sup>6</sup> Following the debate on identity, it appears that, like the (false) dictum about 'the end of ideology', we should consider a future of fragmented, liquid identity.

Whether this identity crisis is real or just an alleged academic one, and regardless of ascribed reasons for this crisis, a subject and society could not exist without identity, regardless of its current theoretical definition, because identity is a practice – a mechanism – that relates the subject to its whole self, and simultaneously relates that same subject to the relevant social and cultural environment, which is primarily responsible for the formation of the subject as a social entity. The roots of identity are in the culture, more precisely in 'the realm of historical opportunities' that provides the options for identity construction. The latter offers certain degrees of freedom that enable people to choose certain elements as their profile of (social) identity. It is argued here that football fandom is such an option for many people worldwide. Moreover, because of its unique characteristics, football fandom offers a stable and continual element of identity, challenging the 'end of identity' thesis.

### **Identity – subject/society**

Any discourse on identity or identification<sup>7</sup> touches an age-old, never-ending question of subject relationships with and/or even versus society; whether identity roots and development are a psychological or social phenomenon. Apparently, in theory as also in practice, the threshold between identity as an individual issue and as a social-cultural issue is predicatively equivocal.<sup>8</sup> As Rutherford argues, 'The rent on our relation with the exterior world is matched by a disruption in our relation with ourselves. Our struggle for identity and sense of personal coherence and intelligibility are centered on the threshold between interior and exterior, between self and others.'<sup>9</sup> Craibe suggests that experience is the decisive factor that should be considered when dealing with identity.<sup>10</sup> Experience is a key concept regarding the link between identity as an individual issue and identity as a social-cultural issue. It is experience that binds them together. Experience – often considered most subjective – is embedded in the individual. It refers to the individual's critical and less critical accumulated encounters, his selected memory stores and thus the modes by which he conceives and reacts to the social world.<sup>11</sup> Experience is in fact what makes him a social entity:

experience is derived from, and projected on, the socio-cultural surroundings. Primarily, it is the social that forms the individual and not vice versa.

This essay's point of departure is that the emergence of identity, its formation and transformation involves the social-cultural and the subject, in that order. The social and the cultural, in fact the multi facets of both, are most effective and critical in the formation of the individual subject's identity. To borrow Thompson's conception of class formation, 'class experience is determined by relations of production within which the individual is born or socialized; class consciousness is the manner by which this experience is treated in cultural terms'.<sup>12</sup> Experience, as already indicated, is a key concept in constructing the concept of identity and, most critically, its practice. Therefore, identity is usually a mundane experience with certain social categories such as ethnic group, class, nation, gender, or allegedly also a more marginal category such as a football club. This complexity is reflected in Bauman's dilemma regarding 'his' national anthem.<sup>13</sup> It is the social-cultural scene that compels the subject (and Bauman) to place himself on a particular emotional, cognitive and symbolic identity. In essence, identity is a multi-faceted practice of selecting options out of available experiences.

It is conservatively presumed here that neither the subject nor the collective could exist without identity. Since we are dealing with the normal and not the pathological, identity is a functional need. Identity maintains the coherence of the subject and the collective. This motivates both to be proactive. Nevertheless, there is no absolute conclusion regarding the specific content and components of identity. However, the following sub-assumptions that portray a frame of reference are worth noting: 1. Regarding the individual subject, identity is a syndrome, or a profile of his various accumulated and selected social-cultural experiences; 2. The components of this syndrome are granted by the external surroundings; 3. A particular component of identity is generally dominant at a certain time or situation; 4. The composition of identity and the temporal domination of the particular component are determined by the realm of opportunities external to the subject. In Weber's phrasing it is possible to suggest that the most seductive component at a certain (historical) period 'decides' the domination in the identity syndrome as aforementioned; 5. An identity crisis, hence a subject's inability to manage his identity, reflects a problematic situation, for example a situation of political ineffectuality.<sup>14</sup>

In every realm of historical opportunities certain instances or categories contest and determine a subject's identity profile: politics, ethnicity, class, gender, etc. The category that is most influential in shaping identity is not always assured a priori. Certain combinations are possible (e.g. class/ethnicity). Individuals do not choose their identity out of an endless stock: they choose their present and future identity out of given options. More often, identity is given and practically imposed upon them by means of ideological articulation.<sup>15</sup> Following Marx's dictum, it is possible to argue that individuals choose their identity but they do it under the social-historical conditions that are available to them. Again, the key word is experience.

Through experience, the individual organizes, that is communicates, selects, absorbs and conserves his relationships or encounters with the world. Experience is the sum of three different levels that relate the subject to the social-cultural surroundings: an emotional level, a cognitive level and a symbolic level. Thus a subject's identity reflects his feelings, his perception regarding certain components of his surroundings, and his evaluation of the meaning of identity. In other words, the particular subject activates these levels: he feels, perceives and interprets, all within the

limits of his social-cultural situation. The above three provide the conceptual framework for the narration of football fandom-identification and its research.

### **Football fan identity**

The relevant literature describes a football fan as one whose devotion to a particular club dominates his entire way of life.<sup>16</sup> Football fandom, meaning a strong affiliation to a football club, is a permanent component in the fan's identity profile. This component successfully competes with other components in this profile, and it generally dominates. This domination is often manifested and challenged: Catalan fans in Barcelona, Catholic fans of Glasgow Celtic, Palestinian fans of Bnei Sakhin in Israel. For certain obvious reasons, football is associated with gender and class. Although more and more women are playing the game and joining the ranks of fans in the stadiums, football is still dominated by men. After the First World War, football was the game of the (male) working classes worldwide, mainly the game of the proletariat. Recently, more middle-class people have joined the ranks of the fans (in the stadiums or as television spectators) but the game remains one of class and gender. Masculinity and the working class are still prominent components in the fan's demographic profile in the twentieth century.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, as Giulianotti states, the football fan category at the turn of the century is diversified.<sup>18</sup> The inflow of middle-class fans and the commercialization of the game have rearranged the mode and intensity of fandom, from the least committed type – the 'flaneurs' and thus the less identified fan, to the most committed type – the involved fan for whom fandom is a total experience.

The traditional most committed fan – the subject of this essay – behaves as if he possesses the club and the game, and behaves accordingly: he attends each of his club's games and his daily and weekly agenda revolves around the football club. This includes his relationships with all of his significant reference others: family, friends and employment. Football is his central life interest,<sup>19</sup> and therefore his peripheral relationships are also influenced by football. He watches sports on TV and the Internet, and he reads the sports section of the newspaper. The key words of his parole are borrowed from football jargon. The traditional fan is deeply involved in football. In other words, fandom of a football club is equated with identification that dominates the fan's identity profile. The traditional fan frequently defines his deep affiliation (even voluntary 'enslavement') as an integral element of his personality. When interviewed, he frequently employed the first person plural 'we'; 'Through the use of a categorical "we", fans articulate their image of themselves, in other words their projection of the self.'<sup>20</sup> Utilizing a veteran sociological concept, it could be suggested that the football club is the fans' 'primary reference other': a critical element in his identity profile.

Predominantly, it is football fandom that produces identity. This identity is one in which the subject fan is highly conscious of his tailored position: 'football fandom is thus based on the duality of identity and identification/self-reflecting'.<sup>21</sup> For the traditional fan, football is a way of life, a habitus in Bourdieu's conception.<sup>22</sup> But unlike Bourdieu, the fan is fully aware of the beliefs and attitudes that are born and bred in the fandom habitus. He is aware of the various levels of fandom (see below). He is aware of the potential strain inherent in this particular habitus: a potential conflict between loyalty to the football club and loyalty to certain significant others such as his family. He is aware that this habitus articulates the personal and the collective, the 'we' (or the 'new-tribe') to which he has voluntarily submitted a dominant

component of his identity. Football fandom provides a fair example that ‘the personal is cultural’<sup>23</sup> or according to the premise of this essay, that culture produces the personal in a form of identity in terms of three levels: emotional, cognitive and symbolic.

### **Fandom as identity: a frame of reference**

It is argued here that football fandom produces a fan’s identity, and that this specific component of identity tends to dominate the fan’s identity profile. Borrowing the concept of experience from other domains,<sup>24</sup> it is also argued here that the subject’s identity profile, including the various weights of its components, is produced by the cumulative experiences that he undergoes in the particular cultural encounters. Based on the relevant literature that deals with identity, social presentations and fan behaviour,<sup>25</sup> this essay suggests that fandom as identity is formed by means of three domains of experience: emotional-affective, cognitive and symbolic. All are articulated through the fan’s experience of the game of football as well as relationships/encounters with non-football experiences.

#### *The emotional-affective experience*

For certain conspicuous reasons, the emotional experience of football fandom seems most critical. A priori fandom of the game of football is an ongoing experience related to the emotional gains and losses of fandom.<sup>26</sup> It is constantly argued that the emotional-affective experience touches the football fan’s personality because it is endowed with therapeutic and cathartic potential.<sup>27</sup> However, the study of fan behaviour convincingly indicates that this emotional experience is not confined to personality; because football fandom is ascribed with certain emotional gains such as self and collective image<sup>28</sup> and with the (emotional) motivation of being with similar others – people who identify with the particular club,<sup>29</sup> the emotional experience in football works as a mechanism that solidifies the individual fans into a collective. This level of experience plays an important role in any kind of collective formation and it plays a critical role in football fandom. Football fandom is the most effective answer to the constant ‘quest for excitement’ of individuals,<sup>30</sup> in a collective (that is, social) formation.

#### *The cognitive experience*

This domain refers to the fan’s cognitive map regarding the central/peripheral position of fandom versus significant others. In practice, the fan evaluates and rates his relationship with his football club. While the emotional experience is mostly spontaneous and appears to be out of the fan’s control, the cognitive experience treats the gains and losses in terms of costs and benefits. This domain of experience divides the mass of fans into passive and involved: the former gain the benefits with minimal costs (i.e., watching games on television). The latter tend to score the balance. In practice, the cognitive domain refers to the fan’s conception of his position in a map that includes significant and non-significant others. This map is allegedly very simple, having only two coloured areas: ‘we’ and ‘they’.<sup>31</sup> Although ‘they’ apparently share the same colour, ‘they’ are differentiated by their potential impact on the fan’s practice. In fact, ‘they’ are sub-categorized by their effect on his identity as fan.<sup>32</sup> In effect, the cognitive

map distinguishes them into different significant others regarding the fan's central interest, which is his football club. Most importantly, the cognitive experience refers to the strain inherent in fandom: the potential conflict with significant others and its gains or losses.

### *The symbolic experience*

Directly or by means of an agency, football fandom is related to the symbolic-cultural context: the particular football club might symbolize ethnicity or nationality and so forth. That is, football fandom embodies an articulation with symbolic aspect(s) of social categories or relations.<sup>33</sup> For example, fandom of Celtic FA in Glasgow embodies Catholicism. Fandom of Barca FA in Barcelona embodies Catalanism. A Fan of Bnei Sachnin (an Arab Club) in Israel embodies ethnicity/nationalism. As with the former two domains, the intensity of the symbolic experience is determined by the broader context: the prominent social-cultural rift in the context imposed on football club fandom.<sup>34</sup> The symbolic experience offers the fan an opportunity to evaluate the meaning of his identity with the football club in comparative and contextual terms. It assists him in answering the question 'Who am I?', that is, to substantiate his entire identity profile.

Relevant studies frequently tend to emphasize the dominance of the emotional-affective experience in fandom<sup>35</sup> and therefore, in identity construction and maintenance. This is due to an apparently very obvious reason: the behaviour of the fan (more often the 'traditional fan') is observed, occasionally a priori, as emotional: his language during the game in and outside the stadium is emotional. His body language – the way he uses his hands, the way he communicates in the stadium – projects strong emotion. The outsider layperson tends to see the fan as if manipulated by his own emotions. Yet although emotions are most visible, the cognitive and symbolic experiences are also effective and on certain occasions, join the emotional domain or even overcome this domain. For example, Barca's fans behave emotionally because of the powerful association between the club and Catalan identity. Or, some fans of a certain club behave emotionally because of the cognitive and symbolic gains they derive from that particular club.

Thus fandom as identity of a particular football club is a tripartite conception and practice. At present we cannot lean on an empirical study in order to deductively suggest any order of influence or weighting of the above three levels of experiences regarding the fan's identification with the football club. Thus, although it is assumed that in certain situations one of the above three concepts dominates, they are henceforth treated as equals. They are used in the following as leading concepts in comprehending a fan's identity with his football club. The combination (but not yet the integration) of the emotional, cognitive and the symbolic experiences of fandom offers more insights into fandom as a component of identity and the meaning (or weight) of the latter in the fan's identity profile.

As noted above, the ongoing debate on identity revolves around two questions concerning formation and stability: does identity form into a stable core with only peripheral changes, or are both core and peripheral bound to change over time? The present study deals with a specific component of identity, that of football fandom. Based on most recent research,<sup>36</sup> it is argued here that football fandom is indestructible: it virtually begins in the cradle and ends in the grave. In other words, it is permanent; it is bounded.

The remainder of this essay treats fandom as identity by referring to traditional Israeli fans. The following study leans on the implications of experience in practice as emotional, cognitive and symbolic elements, and argues that the specific combination of these elements produces fandom as identity: a dominant element in the identity profile.

### **The study**

One hundred and forty three Israeli football fans were interviewed. They were fans of five clubs from the Primer League in Israel, which included 12 clubs at the time of the study: Hapoel Tel Aviv, Maccabi Haifa, Maccabi Netanya, Beitar Jerusalem and Bnei Sachnin (an Arab Club). A survey of football fans in Israel preceded the selection of these clubs. The Primer League club fans constitute the major proportion of football fans in Israel. The five selected clubs represent the diversity of the football clubs in Israel by political affiliation, ethnicity/nationality, regions, and a few other macro characteristics. However, the interviewees do not reflect the diversity of the fans, because of this study's prominent orientation toward the category of traditional fans, as narrated by Giulianotti,<sup>37</sup> and because the study was interested in interviewing fans with a history of fandom; young fans under 21 years of age were not included in the research. In practice, this is a study of the profile and mode of conduct of the traditional Israeli fan in 2004.

Using a list of club fans, which was provided to the researcher by the clubs' fan associations and then using a snowball technique, 30 fans of each of the above clubs were interviewed, except for Maccabi Netanya, where only 23 fans were interviewed. As noted above, the 143 interviewees do not reflect the entire football fan crowd in the stadiums. It was decided to interview five women of each club, assuming that women constitute approximately 15% of the fans in the stadiums. 12% of the interviewees were women while approximately 20% of the interviewees are Arabs. Their representation in this study is overestimated compared to their true representation in the entire Israeli Primer League fan base. But the major reason that this study does not reflect the entire fan base in Israel is invested in the conception and planning of the present study: as noted above, it was decided to interview only fans over 21 years of age who have been fans of their particular club for at least five years, and who regularly visit their club's home games. In effect, this study deals with adult experienced fans.

The above fans were interviewed at home by means of a questionnaire, which included questions about visiting the club games, behaviour in the stadium, consuming football in the media, relationships with fans and others, aggression, racism, emotional aspects, cognitive aspects, symbolic aspects, and so on. The majority of the questionnaire comprised open questions: the interviewees were asked to answer the questions in their own words. This method of research is related to a qualitative approach in the social sciences, and thus prescribes the mode of analysing the raw material: the written responses of the 143 interviewees.

This essay deals only with specific parts of the above research: fandom as identity. The interviewed fans defined their identification with their club as very strong. Three clusters of questions that were marked during the composition of the questionnaire as referring to three levels of experiencing fandom as identity: emotional, cognitive, symbolic, were decoded by underlying the repeated-domination (key) issues in each cluster, and then interpreted as closely as possible to their conceptual assignment above.

The results are then presented by specifying key words and the general tendency that dominates the cluster of responses. A qualitative method, such as the one used here, is very close to symptomatic reading: it forces the researcher to read between the lines.

### **The profile of the fan**

The profile of the fan in this study is as follows: male (78%), 30 years of age, possesses a secondary/post-secondary education, hired employee with an average gross income of approximately 9,000 shekels per month (approx. \$2,000 at the time of interviewing) – above the average Israeli employee income at the time of the study. Politically, the fan leans either to the left or to the right but does not adopt an extremely radical view, aside from a minority. He became affiliated with his club approximately at the age of 10 and has been a fan ever since. He consumes a large amount of football. He attends almost every alternate Saturday game at the home stadium. He occasionally travels to attend his club's away games. He watches other Premier League and National League (the second division) club games on television. He follows the Champions League games on television. He reads the sports section in the daily newspaper. He uses the Internet to stay up-to-date about his club and other football events. In essence, he is a traditional fan per se: football fandom is his way of life. Literally, football is his life.

### **I feel, I know, I signify**

Fans' monologues are offered on emotional-affective, cognitive and symbolic domains. The fans' responses allow certain but quite effective insights regarding the weight of the club in the fan's entire identity. The leading concepts of this essay are translated into three fan practices: he feels (emotional), he knows (cognitive), he signifies (symbolic). These were phrased in the form of certain questions that were posed to the interviewees.

### ***The emotional-affective domain***

This domain is examined by means of a few open-ended questions concerning the fan's emotional experience. 'What are your feelings when your team wins the game?' 'Happiness' and 'joy' are the frequent key words in the fans' responses to this question. A third word is often 'pride'. 'In one word (I feel) happiness'. 'Great joy. Pride. I feel that they [the team] fulfilled my wish.' 'I am very happy.' 'Proud, an urge to get up in the morning.' 'Elation, a lot of joy.' 'I feel pride, joy and excitement.' The interviewees add that after a victory they are 'more willing to meet other people', 'have a good time', 'feel that they belong to something', 'be optimistic', 'the victory made my entire week'.

And the opposite: 'what are your feelings when your team loses?' The key word is 'lousy'. Another key word is 'failure'. Also used but less frequently than the above are 'depression' and 'disappointment'. 'I feel lousy going to work and seeing people.' 'I feel sad.' 'I could be depressed for the whole month.' 'Lousiness. It's very difficult to describe.' 'The failure ruins my week.' 'I feel depressed all evening long. I don't read the daily paper the next morning.' 'When they lose, I take it personally.' 'Big disappointment. I'm troubled by the tension after the loss. I live with it but it's very hard.' 'I'm frustrated all week long.' However, a few express different feelings. 'A fan is judged by failures: I feel more identified when the team loses. When the team loses I feel a greater sense of belonging.' Emotion is a double-edged football experience,

endured through victories and losses. As anticipated, both situations are strongly tied to the fan's identification with the club. In fact, the opposite is also correct; by definition traditional fans are defined as such because their identification with the club is independent of the club's immediate achievements.

Nevertheless, the fan needs reinforcements. It is not just the game of football that maintains his long-standing (emotional) identification with the particular club. 'What do you gain from your club?' The relevant studies refer to the fan-club relationships as 'topophilia' – affection toward a particular social place.<sup>38</sup> This place, embodied in the club's stadium, is in effect 'a home'. The unification of home and football produces more than pure joy.

One cluster of key words is most conspicuous: 'pride', 'happiness', 'love', all seem to share a common denominator: 'excitement'. It is anticipated that the traditional fan refers to his club (or team) in emotional terms. The level of emotion, as previously noted, is probably the major factor that underlies fan-club relationships. As noted above, this level carries more gains than just joy of the game itself. Additional gains revolve around identification: 'feelings of identification'; 'a shared feeling of common victory and failure', and 'A feeling of identification with something', 'a feeling of belonging to an agenda above and beyond football', and 'an object of identification – an important motive for everything'.

An additional question that focuses on the game: 'What did you gain from that (football) game?' Although the separation between football as a game and football as a club is academic, it seems that the interviewees are aware of the co-existence of two entities. The cluster of responses to the possible gains from the game per se is indicated by certain key words: 'belonging', 'outlet' and 'identity', and motivates the reader to conclude that the game of football is more than just a mere game, that football is an emotional community – concrete and/or virtual. The dominant response to the above question affirmed the above, albeit temporary, conclusions: 'the feeling of a collective, of identification with a common goal', 'a feeling of identification with the team and the supporters', 'a feeling of being part of the collective', 'I like this tribalism', 'participation in a collective experience', 'a feeling of being in something that creates participation', 'a big family'.

The emotional domain, as anticipated, has a very strong grip on the football fan's identification with his club. Only a few other similar affiliations to cultural events, such as pop music, entail so many deep emotions. Most importantly, the fan is aware of the connection between emotion and identity with the club.

### *The cognitive domain*

The cognitive domain refers to the location of the club in the fan's cognitive (real or imagined) map. Based on information derived from the current study of fans' behaviour, it is possible to suggest that because the affiliation with the club is a central life interest, its position on the map affects other relationships. Particularly, almost any of the fan's relations with significant others are influenced (more often, determined) by his fandom/identification with his club. Most of the time the fan's relationships with significant others are based on a division of labour between the fan and others, such as family and close friends, backed by the latter's de facto recognition of his football craze. But this may put strain on these relationships, such as a conflict of loyalties to club versus family or friends. Cognitive as experience means that the strain is engraved in the fan's cognitive map.

This section of the study begins with a narration of the fan's map when football is ultimate. 'What else is important to you besides football?' The first interviewee speaks more or less for the others; his cognitive map includes family, friends, politics, music and work. Considering the cluster of responses proffered by the interviewed fans it is possible to replace 'music' with other cultural events or hobbies (theatre, travelling, photography, etc.). Family, friends and work in that order, are most important to the fan, aside from football. This entails a great deal of potential tension. The family, the most intimate primary group, constitutes a constant threat to the fan's identification with his club: 'Suppose that you are invited to a family event that coincides with one of your team's games, what do you do?' Every fan is aware of the potential conflict between primary loyalties, but this conflict is theoretically quite rare. The season's games schedule is available to the fans beforehand so unexpected family events (weddings, Bar or Bat Mitzvahs, birthdays, etc.) are few.<sup>39</sup> However, the fan anticipates a possible conflict of loyalties and he is strategically prepared for the following encounter: the stage is already set – family and friends are aware of his priorities, that he spends the season's weekends at the stadium. Moreover, family, friends and the rest of his significant others are instructed that football underlies his daily routine. However, during certain occasions he encounters a conflict of loyalties. Explicitly, this appears as a conflict over his attention and social commitments. Implicitly, this is primarily a contest between components of identity for domination over his identity profile.

A conflict situation in which the fan is required to fulfil a family obligation on account of his club obligations offers three options or operative tactics: one – to stick to the game, two – to surrender to the family, three – to engineer a pragmatic solution, essentially a compromise. It is assumed that the selection of an option is dependent on the importance of the event; in other words its weight and significance for the fan and his family. Almost all the interviewees have experienced a situation in which family events clashed with a club game. Approximately half (70) chose the game: 'This just happened to me last week. ... if I'm invited I'm not going.' 'This happened to me before. I went to the game.' 'I'll go to the game. This happened to me 20 times before. I'm considered an outcast [by the family].' While reading the fans' responses to this question it was obvious to the reader that they are in an onerous situation: they weigh the gains and losses of their choice of options. But many of the traditional fans are ready to pay the price of their decision. The reward is worthy.

A quarter of the interviewees chose the family event. 'The family event wins. You can't do anything [refuse].' The fans that chose this option expressed their ambivalence and powerlessness. They feel that they must apologize for their betrayal or at least, desertion. The remaining fans handled the situation by opting for a pragmatic solution. It appears that this group of fans chose a tactic that prevented a potential conflict from escalating, 'I'll go to the family event but I'll watch the game on television in the back room.' Or 'I'll pop into the family event, and then I'll go to the game.' The cognitive dissonance does not evaporate, but it is blunted. The fan feels that while he has fulfilled his family obligation, his loyalty to the club is not impaired.

### *The symbolic domain*

The football club is a symbol by which the fan signifies and identifies himself to various close or distant collectives such as ethnic or class categories. It is worth noting that in Israel most of the clubs carry their historical name. The state-wide political sport federations – Hapoel (Labour), Maccabi (bourgeoisie) and Beitar (right-wing),

were and still are (but with far less effect than before) political symbols.<sup>40</sup> At the beginning of the 1990s most of the clubs in the first division league (later the Premier League) became privatized: the clubs turned into a kind of business corporation. Players changed clubs when their contracts expired and a better one was offered. Management changed its face: new, business-oriented directors replaced the old guard of public (political) directors. Eventually, like in Europe,<sup>41</sup> the club became the focus of reference. Indeed, when the Israeli fans in this study were asked to decide which of the following was most important: players, management, coaches and the club itself, 75% chose the club. This result was not surprising; the ongoing transformation of football in Israel from 'a game to a commodity' turned the club into a central symbol of identity. A fan could constantly evaluate his status, his position in close and distant relationship circles and his identity profile by means of the symbolic experience of his club. The interviewees of this study are doing just this.

If indeed the club is a focal point of symbolic identity, it is reasonable to suggest that the fan's self-image is derived (at least in substantial part) from the football club, 'How do you feel when others identify you as a fan of the club?' The key word repeated by almost all the interviewees is 'proud'. Reading the cluster of responses to this question enables the reader to conclude that a fan's self-image leans on his particular football club. 'I'm proud of belonging [to the club]', 'I'm proud of being identified as part of something [the club]', 'I'm proud of this. Everybody at work knows that I am a fan of ..., my car is covered with stickers [of the club]', 'I'm proud that others know that I belong to this club'. The symbolic level of the football club seems most effective in the fan's identity profile.

The symbolic experience of identity with the football club is highly instrumental: it indicates sameness and otherness; it scores and weighs the affiliation with the club v other football and non-football experiences. In order to estimate the relative symbolic weight of the particular club, the club was confronted with the Israeli National Side, which is charged with national symbolism. When the interviewees were asked to decide, 'What is more important to you, the Israeli National Side or your club?', 75% picked the latter. The symbolic experience makes it possible for the traditional fan to differentiate, to compare himself with others, to be unique, to indicate that football fandom is a critical component of his identity.

## Conclusion

Thus, as the above discussion evidently suggests, football fandom is a marker of identity in practice. The present study refers to the relationships between fans and their club, and highlights the practice of identity: the fan considers the club his 'alter ego'. He is constantly engaged in bounding his relations with the club. Relationships with the club are registered on three domains of experience: the emotional-affective, the cognitive and the symbolic. The practice of identity is embodied in the fan's life thereby making fandom a way of life and dictating the fan's relationships with significant others. The Israeli fans interviewed in this study encounter a continuous strain. This strain has two facets: one regarding the relationship with the football club, a tension inherent in the game – contest of football, wins or losses, joy or depression. Two, his relationships with significant others, which are symptoms of the inner contest between components of identity. This tension is inherent to his personality as culture: he is a family member, an employee, a friend, etc. He ascribes a higher, more critical importance to his football club and to being a fan than to his other social roles.

In fact, this tension reflects the potential internal discord between the components of his identity. The tension is often an ordeal: his concrete loyalty to the club is tested and measured. His identity is questioned.

Football fandom, therefore, is indeed a practice of identity. This essay does not deal with the possibility that football fandom gives vent to other components of identity such as ethnicity or nationality. The Arab interviewees and also certain Jewish interviewees in this study clearly describe the bounded correlation between their club and their ethnic-nationality ascription: a combination that turns certain football games in Israel into harsh verbal and physical encounters between footballing affiliation and nationality. However, as already suggested, football fandom is a trio of experiences: emotional-affective, cognitive and symbolic. Accumulated experience is a series of encounters responsible for one's solidification of identity profile. Football fandom experiences are transformed into a dominant component of the traditional fan's profile. The fan is aware of the critical position of his identification with the club regarding his life. It was self constructed. In an historical realm of opportunity where national boundaries are assaulted by globalization, class boundaries are brutally erased, gender hegemony is challenged, ethnicity is divided into various selves, and so forth, identity, precisely the maintenance of it, is becoming problematic. Football is still a solid basis of identity. The football club is a deep water port; it offers the traditional fan anchorage in the past, present and anticipated future.

## Notes

1. Hall, 'Introduction', 2.
2. *Ibid.*, 5–6.
3. Hall, 'Old and New Identities', 225.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Bauman, *The Individualized Society*; Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*.
6. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*.
7. Brubaker and Cooper, 'Beyond Identity'.
8. Bosma *et al.*, *Identity and Development*; Vogler, 'Social Identity'.
9. Rutherford, *Identity, Community*, 24.
10. Craibe, *Experiencing Identity*.
11. Brewer, 'Social Identities'; Moscovici, *Social Influence*.
12. Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, 9–10.
13. Bauman, *Identity*.
14. Allahar, 'The Politics'.
15. Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*.
16. Ben Porat, *Oh, What a Delightful War*.
17. Giulianotti, *Football*; Archetti, 'Masculinity and Football'; Dunning *et al.*, *Fighting Fans*; Ben Porat, *From a Game to Commodity*.
18. Giulianotti, 'Supporters, Followers'.
19. Ben Porat, *Oh, What a Delightful War*.
20. Sandvoss, *A Game of Two Halves*, 37.
21. *Ibid.*, 31.
22. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*.
23. Hills, *Fan Culture*, 72.
24. Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*.
25. Tajfel, *Human Groups*; Turner *et al.*, *Rediscovering the Social Groups*; Brewer, 'The Social Self'; Hills, *Fan Culture*; Wann *et al.*, *Sport Fans*.
26. Hills, *Fan Culture*.
27. Lopes, 'All Together'.
28. Wann *et al.*, *Sport Fans*; Tajfel, *Human Groups*.
29. Foldesi, *Social and Demographic Characteristics*.

30. Elias and Dunning, *Quest for Excitement*.
31. Tajfel, *Human Groups*; Sandvoss, *A Game of Two Halves*.
32. Stryker and Serpe, 'Identity Salience'.
33. Brukbaek and Cooper, *Beyond Identity*.
34. Gruneau, *Class, Sport, Finn, 'Racism, Religion'*; Archetti, 'Masculinity and Football'.
35. Grossberg, 'Identity and Cultural Studies'; Hills, *Fan Culture*.
36. Giulianotti, *Football*; Dunning *et al.*, *Fighting Fans*; Sandvoss, *A Game of Two Halves*; Ben Porat, *Oh, What a Delightful War*.
37. Giulianotti, 'Supporters, Followers'.
38. Giulianotti, *Football*, 69.
39. The football league in Israel is conducted on Sabbath (Saturday). Family events such as weddings are organized for during the week – not on the Sabbath. The Moslems' Holy Day is Friday. Hence probability of a conflict of loyalties is indeed very low, but it is a part of the fan's concrete experience.
40. Ben Porat, *From a Game to Commodity*.
41. King, *The European Ritual*.

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